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ABSTRACT

Socioeconomic factors related to second class citizenship can not only limit opportunities but also contribute to an acceleration of the aging process. This paper presents baseline data on the socioeconomic plight of the Spanish speaking elderly. Data pertain to: population growth, nativity, family status, education, labor force participation, income, home ownership, mobility, crime victimization, and voting. Data indicate that: although the elderly Spanish origin population has numerically tripled in the last two decades, they represent approximately 3.5% of the total Spanish origin population; the Spanish origin elderly are largely younger elderly; half are of Mexican origin; three-quarters live in the central city of larger metropolitan areas; approximately 10% live with their children; the majority live in husband-wife primary family households; females are more likely to live alone; the Spanish speaking elderly have the second highest illiteracy rate in the U.S. among racial/ethnic groups; they are less likely than other elderly to be retired; they have extremely high rates of home ownership and are more likely than not to own a home built before 1949; they report low rates of victimization and exhibit high rates of "feeling safe" in their neighborhoods; and they have the highest rates of inter-county mobility, especially among persons 85 years and over. (NQ)

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THE SPANISH ORIGIN ELDERLY: A DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY, 1970-1975

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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Introduction[1]

Everyone ages. Aging is a natural process which is physical and apparent. Aging is characterized by the loss of elasticity of the muscles, skin and arteries; and the diminishing ability to regenerate cells. Consequently, one's reaction time slows down, one's hair thins and turns grey, one's skin wrinkles and one's hearing and vision are often affected. In humans, this natural process of aging is compounded by socioeconomic and cultural-psychological factors which dictate the pace of aging. Thus while everyone ages, some age before others and some age in different ways than others. Socioeconomic factors related to second class citizenship such as low levels of education, low income, large families, inadequate housing and limited health care, result not only in limited opportunities but also contribute to an acceleration of the aging process. Cultural factors such as a strong adherence to a foreign language, familial support systems, and socilization in bicultural community structure those values that dictate behavior. Standards for what is proper and improper, approved or disapproved are value judgments deeply ingrained into our psyche from years of exposure and reinforcement by the environment.

An understanding of aging among the Spanish speaking elderly requires that one take into account the effects of both socioeconomic and cultural factors. This paper, however, will focus only upon one of these two for the simple reason that a need exists to present the baseline data needed to understand the socioeconomic plight of the Spanish speaking elderly. Although limited to a profile of the elderly as a statistical aggregate, this information will hopefully serve as a basis for the needed discussions based primarily on cultural factors.

Growth

The elderly Spanish origin population[1] has numerically tripled in the last two decades yet they represent approximately 3.5 percent of the total Spanish origin population. Some have seen this figure and voiced the uninformed opinion that one cannot be overly concerned with so small a group. In comparison to the White-Anglo population where 10 percent of their population are 65 and over, the proportion of elerly does indeed appear small. What must be taken into account is that the Spanish origin population (excluding the Cuban origin population) is presently undergoing a process similar to that experienced by the U.S. population in the 1900's where the number of elderly continue to double or triple in number but their proportion to the population as a whole remains low.

For example, in 1900, 4 percent of the U.S. population totalling 76 million were 65 years or older. Forty years later, the number of elderly had tripled but the proportion of persons 65+ still only represented 5.4 percent of the total. The major reasons for the apparent improvement in proportional representation were the high rates of fertility in pre-War America and the large influx of immigrants — most of whom were young adults.

The Mexican American population is in the midst of a similar process. The Mexican American population has one of the highest fertility rates among all racial/ethnic groups[2]. In addition, immigration to the U.S. — both legal and illegal — continues unabated to the extent that since 1930, the largest number of legal entries into the U.S. have entered from Mexico (approximately 70,000 each year). The only exception was in 1960, when an even larger influx of Cuban refugees — another Spanish speaking minority and one with an exceedingly large proportion (approximately 20 percent) of elderly superseded the Mexican immigrants. Presently, there is no sign that

either fertility will decrease dramatically nor that immigration from Mexico will slow down. These two factors combine to limit the proportion of older persons despite their numerical growth. The small proportion of Spanish origin elderly should not be interpreted to mean either that this age group's problems are fewer or less severe than the problems of other Spanish origin age groups for as the Spanish origin elderly continue to grow numerically, their particular problems grow with them.

Results

Table 1.1 shows that a perceptible decrease has occurred in the proportion of Spanish origin persons 65 years and over since 1970 for the reasons discussed above. In contrast to the total population whose median age (The point at which fifty percent of the population is above and below that age) is increasing, the Spanish origin median age has decreased somewhat. Numerically, however, the Spanish origin elderly increased at the rate of approximately 23 percent from 1970 to 1975.

Table 1.2 further indicates that the Spanish origin elderly are largely younger elderly; half are of Mexican origin; and three-quarters live in the central city of larger metropolitan areas. Since 1970, the trends have been for an increase in the younger elderly, an increase in the proportional representation of the Cuban elderly, and a trend toward decentralization from the central city to the suburbs.

Despite the stereotype, the Spanish origin elderly tend to be urban dwellers. In Texas, for example, 78,309 Mexican origin elderly lived in urban areas compared to 16,607 rural Mexican origin elderly -- a ratio of five to one in 1970. It is also important to note that the Spanish origin elderly represent 4.6 percent of the total urban Spanish origin population and 4.9 percent of the total rural Spanish origin population. Thus, programs

aimed at only urban populations will have the largest target population but proportionately equal representation in both types of residence indicate that programs aimed at rural segments have a task of equal importance.

Finally, Table 1.3 contrasts the largest of the Spanish origin groups, namely, the Mexican origin elderly with the total Spanish origin population. These results show that the increase in the number of Mexican elderly is growing at a rate of approximately double of that found in the Spanish origin population as a whole. Further evidence is found in the trend for the median age of the Mexican origin population to increase while the median age for the total Spanish origin population is declining.

Nativity

A large proportion -- almost half -- of the Spanish origin elderly are foreign born (See Table 2.1), This fact is significant for the foreign born have perspectives, especially as it relates to social roles and traditions which cannot be discounted. Traditional values regarding decision-making in the household or deference patterns are more likely to persist among the foreign born and this must be considered in developing programs. The rather large proportions of Mexican United States born population is a clear indication of the size of the Mexican Americans who have lived in the Southwestern U.S. since the nineteenth century. The extraordinarily high proportions of Puerto Ricans and Cubans who are foreign born is of course expected.

Family Status

One of the most dangerous stereotypes ever perpetuated is one which views the Spanish origin elderly as living with their children and being adequately cared for in their old age. This stereotype has resulted in numerous injustices and is in direct variance with the facts. The proportion of Spanish origin elderly living with their children is approximately 10 percent (see Table 2.2)

with a slightly higher proportion in rural areas. The stereotypical image of three generations living under one roof is not supported by these facts. As indicated in Table 2.2, the majority of the elderly live in husband-wife primary family households. While the Mexican origin population varies somewhat from the family status patterns of the total Mexican origin population, the Spanish origin elderly have family status patterns which are strikingly similar to the proportions calculated for the total Spanish origin population.

The categories, "other male head," and "female head" would represent situations where the elderly live in someone else's home (e.g., their son, their grandson, their son-in-law, etc). While it is noted that if such housing arrangements take place, they are more likely to live in a female headed household, (e.g., an unmarried or widowed daughter, a divorced or separated granddaughter, etc.). The proportions of elderly persons in these arrangements is small in comparison to the number of elderly persons living alone as "primary individuals". The Spanish origin elderly are three times as likely to live alone than to live in someone else's home -- especially elderly Spanish origin women.

It is of course possible to maintain close ties with one's family without having to live under the same roof. Living in close proximity can be in many ways equivalent, however, little is known presently about the relative proximity of the Spanish origin elderly to their family in comparison to other racial/ethnic groups.

Information derived from a previously discussed table (Table 2.1) indicates that a much smaller gap in the number of Spanish origin elderly males and Spanish origin elderly females. Female excess, (a demographic term used for the overrepresentation of females in the later age groupings) is

much less pronounced among the Spanish origin elderly and this fact holds two significant implications. Firstly, since marital status is less likely to be divorced, separated, or widowed, the Spanish origin elderly should be regarded as couples rather than as isolated individuals. Also, the fact that females do not outlive men to a greater extent indicates an equalization of life chances, not based upon sturdier or healthier males but upon a lower socioeconomic life style in which both males and females struggle equally with females exposed to greater risks than females from other racial/ethnic groupings.

Other Socioeconomic Indicators:

Several other indicators can be briefly touched upon because they are interrelated:

Education: Table 3.1 shows that the Spanish speaking elderly have low educational achievement. This group has the second highest illiteracy rate in the U.S. among racial/ethnic groups (the Native American elderly have a higher rate). Persons who complete less than five years of formal schooling are regarded as illiterate. The results in Table 3.1, show that the Mexican origin elderly are four to six times more likely not to completed five years of schooling than the total population. As a whole, the median years of schooling for Mexican origin elderly is below the literacy indicator of five years of schooling and barely over that level for all Spanish origin elderly.

Labor Force Participation:

Tables 3.2 - 3.4, show the extent to which the Spanish origin elderly remain active in the civilian labor force after age sixty-five. A surprising proportion are working full time although their occupations are generally at

the lowest occupational levels, largely concentrated in operatives, craftsmen and unskilled categories. The Mexican origin elderly also represent a relatively high proportion of farm laborers. Mexican elderly are most likely of all the Spanish origin groups, to be in the labor force, Puerto Rican elderly are more likely to be unemployed and Cuban elderly are more likely to be employed full time. In general, Spanish origin elderly are less likely than other elderly to be retired. This is due no doubt by persons who spend most of their lives in occupations without social security benefits or pension programs. It has also been suggested by some that this phenomena represents a cultural pattern of "activity" and still others that it may be due to the lack of information on the availability of old age assistance or knowledge of eligibility requirements.

At least in 1970, urban dwellers and rural residents were equally likely to be in the labor force (see table 3.3). The proportion of Spanish origin elderly in the civilian labor force do vary, however, according to the metropolitan area in which they reside (see Table 3.4). Males have higher participation rates in Chicago, Dallas, Houston, Jersey City, McAllen-Pharr-Edingburg, Miami, Oxnard-Ventura, and Pueblo. The lowest proportions for males are in Albuquerque, Fresno, Sacramento, San Jose, and Tucson. Females have higher participation rates in Brownsville-Harlingen-San Bernito, Chicago, Dallas, Houston, Phoenix, and San Francisco-Oakland. The lowest participation rates for females are in Corpus Christi, Denver, Fresno, Oxnard-Ventura, Pueblo, San Bernadino-Riverside - Ontario, and San Jose. These differences needless to say fluctuate depending upon supply and demand and the location of particular types of industries or need for personal services (i.e., maids, housekeepers, etc).

Income:

The figures in Table 4 confirm the low income level of the Spanish origin elderly. The mean earnings of the Spanish origin elderly are approximately one-third of the median earnings level of the total population (approximately $12,800) and half of the median earnings level of the total Spanish origin population (approximately $9,600). Only the Native American elderly have lower mean earnings than the Spanish origin elderly.

Other Characteristics:

The Spanish origin elderly are also characterized by: (1) low representation in the institutionalized population. So few Spanish origin elderly persons reside in homes, hospitals, sanitariums, etc., that no proportion is published nationwide because the numerical base is so small. (2) home ownership: The Spanish origin elderly have extremely high rates of home ownership and are more likely than not to own a home built before 1949. (3) mobility: Spanish origin elderly have the highest rates of inter-county mobility (as measured by residence five years ago) among all elderly persons. While females are more mobile than males, the highest mobility is among Spanish origin elderly persons, 85 years and over -- especially intracounty moves. (4) crime victimization: the Spanish origin elderly self report low rates of victimization and exhibit high rates of "feeling safe" in their neighborhoods. (5) Voting: the Spanish origin elderly are less likely to be registered than other elderly groups, particularly females (see Table 5). Those who are registered tend to vote, but most Spanish origin elderly persons are not registered to vote -- some because of their citizenship status.

Conclusion

It is not a simple task to portray the Spanish origin elderly. When one approach is taken, whether social-cultural, psychological or demographic, only the mere outline is given. This attempt to view the Spanish origin elderly as a statistical grouping is limited to the common demographic indicators available. These findings may or may not be representative of the Spanish origin elderly in any particular location. At the local level, further studies must be conducted to fill in the details so that this knowledge of the local situation may be compared to the national level figures presented here. In combination with the existing literature and experience gained, it is possible to comprehend the Spanish origin elderly as products of communities, which depending upon the degree of physical isolation imposed upon them, proceed to confront their environment although inadequately informed and often lacking the ability to communicate with agents of that external system.

REFERENCES

[1]The basic perspective presented in the introduction are adopted from Adelina Ortiz de Hill, "The Spanish Speaking Elderly and Vital Health Concerns," in La Luz (July - August, 1975) p. 17.

[2]The percentage of growth from 1950 to 1960 in the U.S. was 18.8 percent. During the same period the Southwest increased its population by 39.2 percent while the Spanish surnamed population increased by 54 percent. From 1960 to 1970, the population increase was 13.9, 23.3, and 76.1 percents, respectively. From "The Changing Fertility Pattern of the Mexican Americans," by Carol Hargadine, Department of Sociology, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, Colorado. (1976) unpublished.

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Table 1.1. Spanish Origin Population 65 Years and Over by Sex, United States, 1970, 1975, and 1976

	1970		1975		1976	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total United States in thousands.....	-	-	209,572	-	211,140	-
Total Spanish origin in thousands.....	9,073	4.5	11,202	5.3	11,117	5.3
Spanish origin 65 years and over.....	404,270	4.4	403,272	3.6	422,446	3.8
Male.....	187,773	4.2	188,430	3.4	(NA)	
Female.....	216,507	4.6	215,842	3.8	(NA)	
Median age of Spanish origin.....	21.1		20.7		20.9	
Median age of total U.S. population..	28.1		28.6		28.9	

Source: Current Population Reports, Series P-20, Nos. 290 and 302, table 3, 1975 and 1976. Persons of Spanish Origin, Subject Report, PC(2)-1C, table 3, 1970.

Table 1.2. Selected Characteristics of the Spanish Origin Population 65 Years and Over, 1970 and 1975.

	Number		Percent of persons 65 and over	
	1970	1975	1970	1975
Age				
65 to 69	163,893	283,000	40.5	70.2
70 to 74	105,294		26.1	
75 to 79	67,803		16.8	
80 to 89	39,382	120,000	9.7	29.8
85 years and over	27,898		6.9	
Persons 65 and over	404,270	403,272	4.4	3.6
Mexican	188,563	220,570	4.2	3.3
Puerto Rican	34,180	25,065	2.4	1.5
Cuban	35,066	63,798	6.4	8.6
Central/South American	146,461	15,433	-	2.3
Other Spanish		78,440	-	5.5
Residence (in 1,000's)				
All metropolitan	317	309	100.0	100.0
In central city	216	204	68.1	66.0
Outside central city	101	105	31.9	34.0
Metropolitan areas 100,000+				
In central city	135	129	33.2	33.9
Outside central city	64	72	15.8	18.9
Metropolitan areas 100,000 or less				
In central city	81	75	20.0	19.7
Outside central city	37	34	9.1	8.9
Nonmetropolitan areas	89	72	21.9	18.9

Source: See Table 1.3.

Table 1.3. Spanish Origin Population 65 and Over by Sex, and Type of Spanish Origin, 1970 and 1975

	Total Spanish Origin		Mexican Origin		Percent change 1970 to 1975	
	1970	1975	1970	1975	Spanish Origin	Mexican Origin
Total population in thousands.....	9,073	11,202	4,532	6,690	23.5	47.6
All males.....	4,453	5,498	2,245	3,346	23.5	49.0
%65 to 74.....	2.9	2.6	2.7	2.4		
%75 years and over	1.3	0.9	1.2	0.7		
Median age.....	20.5	19.7	19.0	19.4		
All females.....	5,620	5,705	2,287	3,344	23.5	46.2
%65 to 74.....	3.0	2.6	2.8	2.5		
%75 years and over	1.6	1.4	1.4	1.2		
Median age.....	21.8	21.6	19.6	20.2		

Source: Current Population Reports, Series P-20, No. 290, table 3, 1975. Persons of Spanish Origin, Subject Report, PC(2)-1C, table 3, 1970.

Table 2.1. Persons of Spanish Origin 65 years and Over by Nativity and Type of Spanish Origin, 1970

	Total		Male		Female	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
All Spanish Origin Persons 65 and over						
Total.....	404,270	100.0	187,763	100.0	216,507	100.0
Native born.....	210,049	52.0	95,663	51.0	114,386	52.8
Foreign born....	194,221	48.0	92,100	49.0	102,121	48.2
Mexican						
Total.....	188,563	100.0	91,646	100.0	96,917	100.0
Native born.....	77,830	41.3	38,802	42.3	39,028	40.3
Foreign born....	110,733	58.7	52,844	57.7	57,889	59.7
Puerto Rican						
Total.....	34,180	100.0	14,482	100.0	19,698	100.0
Native born.....	3,191	9.3	1,520	10.5	1,671	8.5
Foreign born....	30,989	90.7	12,962	89.5	18,027	91.5
Cuban						
Total.....	35,066	100.0	13,624	100.0	21,442	100.0
Native born.....	2,434	6.9	1,138	8.4	1,296	6.0
Foreign born....	32,632	93.1	12,486	91.6	10,146	94.0

Source: Persons of Spanish Origin, Subject Report, PC(2)-1C, 1970.

Table 2.2. Households with Spanish and Mexican Origin Heads by Type of Household, March 1975.

Household by Type	All Spanish Origin		Mexican Origin	
	Total	65+	Total	65+
All households (in 1,000's)	2,896	257	1,638	152
Percent.....	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Primary families.....	85.0	70.0	86.7	70.4
Husband-wife.....	66.2	60.3	70.4	58.9
Other male head.....	3.1	1.6	3.3	2.8
Female head.....	15.8	8.1	13.0	8.8
Primary individuals.....	15.0	30.0	13.3	29.6
Male.....	8.2	7.4	7.9	9.1
Female.....	6.8	22.6	5.4	20.5

Source: Current Population Reports, Series P-20, No. 290, 1975.

Table 3.1. Spanish Origin Persons 65 Years and Over by Selected Educational Characteristics, 1975

	Total Population	Spanish Origin Persons 65+		
		Total	Mexican	Other
Percent completed less than 5 years of school.....				
Males.....	12.6	41.5	58.8	18.3
Females.....	9.7	49.4	68.2	27.7
Percent completed 4 years of high school or more...				
Males.....	33.4	16.8	3.2	36.6
Females.....	36.5	12.8	3.9	23.8
Median school years.....				
Males.....		6.3	3.4	-
Females.....		5.0	2.6	8.1

Source: See Table 2.2.

Table 3.2. Spanish Origin Persons 65 Years and Over by Labor Force Characteristics, U.S. and Southwestern States, 1970

	Percent in the Labor Force		Percent Unemployed		Percent Full-time Workers	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Total Spanish Origin						
United States.....	26.9	8.5	7.3	11.8	46.3	39.5
Mexican.....	33.5	7.4	7.7	12.4	43.0	40.2
Puerto Rican.....	22.4	8.5	8.4	18.2	47.6	44.6
Cuban.....	22.7	5.5	8.0	17.6	58.2	42.8
Southwestern States						
Arizona.....	22.3	9.9	2.2	14.4	53.8	45.8
Mexican.....	22.2	8.9	2.3	19.4	52.5	55.3
Puerto Rican.....	-	-	-	-	-	-
Cuban.....	-	-	-	-	-	-
California.....	22.6	8.2	8.4	13.4	42.5	35.6
Mexican.....	23.0	7.8	8.4	14.2	41.4	34.7
Puerto Rican.....	19.8	5.7	27.4	-	29.6	26.2
Cuban.....	32.6	2.7	4.3	51.3	35.5	48.7
Colorado.....	17.8	3.6	12.5	9.5	44.1	31.5
Mexican.....	12.5	5.2	10.8	12.0	45.6	55.7
Puerto Rican.....	-	-	-	-	-	-
Cuban.....	-	-	-	-	-	-
New Mexico.....	14.8	5.7	8.0	5.3	40.7	33.7
Mexican.....	15.5	5.8	4.0	-	37.9	37.8
Puerto Rican.....	-	-	-	-	-	-
Cuban.....	-	-	-	-	-	-
Texas.....	26.9	5.8	7.3	7.3	44.2	42.7
Mexican.....	26.9	-	7.4	7.4	44.1	43.3
Puerto Rican.....	-	-	-	-	-	-
Cuban.....	-	-	-	-	-	-

Source: See Table 2.1.

Table 3.3. Spanish Origin Persons 65 Years and Over by Percent in the Civilian Labor Force and Type of Residence, 1970 and 1974

	1970		1974	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Total Spanish origin United States.....	26.6	9.2	19.2	5.2
All Metropolitan Areas				
Total.....	26.9	9.9	19.2	3.9
In central cities.....	26.0	10.0	18.6	4.2
Outside central cities...	28.6	9.6	-	-
Metropolitan areas of 1,000,000 or more				
In central cities.....	25.0	10.7	-	3.9
Outside central cities...	26.7	8.8	-	-
Metropolitan areas of less than 1,000,000				
In central cities.....	25.0	11.1	-	-
Outside central cities...	-	-	-	-
All Nonmetropolitan.....	25.6	6.5	-	-

Table 3.4. Persons of Spanish Origin 65 Years and Over in the Civilian Labor Force by Sex and Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas, and Selected Places, 1970

SMSA's	Percent in Labor Force	
	Male	Female
Albuquerque	11.0	7.5
Anaheim, Santa Ana, Garden Grove	24.9	7.2
Brownsville, Harlingen, San Benito	26.9	10.4
Chicago	29.7	13.6
Corpus Christi	22.8	4.2
Dallas	34.3	10.8
Denver	26.5	2.0
Detroit	23.0	8.4
El Paso	21.7	7.8
Fresno	14.7	4.2
Houston	37.3	10.1
Jersey City	33.5	6.4
Laredo	25.3	5.4
Los Angeles, Long Beach	23.7	9.4
McAllen, Pharr, Edinburg	33.2	7.0
Miami	33.5	6.5
New York City	24.8	9.8
Oxnard, Ventura	38.7	3.7
Phoenix	21.0	12.5
Pueblo	87.0	3.0
Sacramento	12.7	8.6
San Antonio	28.7	6.2
San Bernadino, Riverside, Ontario	21.2	3.4
San Diego	24.5	5.8
San Francisco-Oakland	23.4	10.4
San Jose	18.9	2.5
Tucson	18.2	8.4

Table 4. Mean Earnings of Spanish Origin Persons 65 or Over by Sex, U.S. and Southwestern States, 1970 and Low Income, 1974

(in dollars)

	All Spanish Origin		Mexican Origin		Puerto Rican Origin	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
All Spanish Origin.....	$4,234	$2,645	$3,548	$2,416	$4,749	$3,061
Arizona.....	3,201	2,244	3,120	2,334	-	-
California.....	4,656	3,269	4,349	3,096	-	-
Colorado.....	2,854	-	-	-	-	-
New Mexico.....	2,951	3,259	2,397	-	-	-
Texas	2,884	1,811	2,759	1,587	-	-
Percent with earnings of $8,000 or more.....	9.5	0.8	7.8	0.8	-	-
Percent below low-income level.....						
Families.....	24.8		26.5			
Unrelated individuals.	33.7		35.8			
Total	28.5					
Metropolitan Areas						
Total	25.3					
Inside central cities	28.3					
Outside central cities	20.8					
Nonmetropolitan areas	42.2					

Sources: See table 2.1; Current Population Reports, Series P-60, No. 102, Table 42, 1975.

Table 5. Reported Registration and Voting of Spanish Origin Persons 65 Years and Over by Sex, November 1976

(in thousands)

	Males		Females	
	65 to 74	75 years and over	65 to 74	75 years and over
All Spanish Origin in thousands.....	146	45	157	65
Reported registered.....	69	16	48	22
Percent.....	47.3	-	30.9	
Reported voted.....	57	6	38	15
Percent.....	39.2	-	24.1	
Reported that they did not vote Total.....	39	39	119	50
Registered.....	12	11	11	7
Not registered.....	77	29	108	43
Do not know.....	9	4	10	- 1

Source: Current Population Reports, Series P-20, No. 293, table 1, 1974.